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Inside Information

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USDA TELECONFERENCING PROPOSAL ACCEPTED

USDA Assistant Secretary for governmental and public affairs Wilmer Mizell presented a proposal to Secretary of Agriculture John R. Block and his senior staff July 25 to establish a video and audio teleconferencing center for the Department.

Larry Quinn, chief of the Video & Film Division in USDA's Office of Information, illustrated the existing facilities and potentials in a 7-minute videotape.

Highlighting potential uses, Quinn noted that only a microwave dish and an audio teleconferencing bridge are needed to permit origination of live audio or video conferences from USDA.

Mizell's proposal was approved by the Secretary and senior staff, and now the Office of Information is proceeding with final planning, approvals and the procurement of equipment.

The central facility will open considerable opportunity for communication with field offices and land grant universities as well as for satellite delivery of USDA's broadcast programs.

One of the first steps toward federal and state cooperation in use of this technology is an assessment of interest in establishing nationwide networks for both video and audio conferencing.

Anyone interested in participating in this manner should contact Larry Quinn who will manage the USDA central facility. He can be reached through the Dialcom mailbox, AGR016, or by calling (202) 447-6072.

FmHA INFORMATION OFFICER DIES

Stan Weston, 53, a public information officer with USDA's Farmers Home Administration since 1978, died of a heart attack at his home in Reston, Va.

Before 1978, Weston served one year as deputy public affairs director in USDA's Office of Governmental & Public Affairs.

Well-known in agricultural journalism, Weston served three times at USDA, 14 years with the National Farmers Union and 2 years as press secretary to then Sen. Walter Mondale.

AGENCY INFORMATION HEADS ADVISE McCLUNG

When the newly-formed agency advisory committee for USDA's Office of Information met July 25, the agency information representatives provided several topics for discussion.

OI's new director, John McClung, heard Bonnie Whyte of USDA's Food & Nutrition Service suggest a news service for food editors.

King Lovinger of the Animal & Plant Health Inspection Service noted a need for training of field personnel in meeting with news media.

Don Hayes of the Agricultural Marketing Service suggested OI leadership in getting out information through new communication methods.

Jim Lafferty, new chief of OI's News Division, described the changes going on in his unit, including plans for a feature service and training.

McClung stressed the new emphasis of OI to serve agencies.

For the next meeting, Aug. 22, agenda suggestions include electronic dissemination and the marketing of USDA publications.

The advisory committee comprises one information representative from each USDA under and assistant secretary.

Representatives are to communicate the results of each meeting with agency information offices not directly represented.

For the sake of continuity, the same people are expected to attend each meeting, McClung said.

A VISITOR INFO CENTER WITH A DIFFERENCE

Sometimes the Design Division of USDA's Office of Information gets called into an information project late in the game so that its best efforts are devoted to patching up or working around earlier steps (mistakes?) of others.

Jim Schleyer, assistant chief of the Design Division, notes that this is not conducive to the best results.

However, in the case of the Begich-Boggs Information Center at the Portage Glacier in USDA's Chugach National Forest in Alaska, the Design Division was called in right at the start. Schleyer is very proud of the results.

The information package includes a huge interpretive exhibit on glaciers, an historical exhibit, "see and do" exhibits, a logo and identity for the whole project and a complete brochure package.

It also includes interpretive trail signage, highway information kiosks and the possibility of radio transmissions along the roads leading to the center.

The center is already under construction near Anchorage. Schleyer says his unit worked very closely with the architect hired by USDA's Forest Service and, in some cases, convinced the firm of the value of changes in design.

The glacier (not the only one in a national forest, by the way), is a heavy tourist attraction, drawing a third of a million visitors a year.

The visitor center was named for two Congressmen, Nick Begich of Alaska and T. Hale Boggs of Louisiana, who were reported missing and are believed to have died in a plane crash near there.

Schleyer's presentation is a delight in itself--a set of slides photographed at pedestrian level inside the model with micro-close-up lens, so that the viewer sees the exhibit just as the visitors will.

Those interested in seeing the model may contact Schleyer after Aug. 8, after he returns from Alaska, at (202) 447-4337.

FOR THE FIRST TIME EVER.....

It doesn't seem possible, but apparently the editors of the various U.S. government's employee newsletters have never met as a group. Now they will, because John R. Block, Secretary of Agriculture, has been named chairman of the annual Combined Federal Campaign for the National Capital Area.

It goes without saying that when your boss is named to chair a drive, the information/public affairs staff gets involved.

Sally Katt, public affairs specialist with the Special Programs Division of USDA's Office of Information, has organized an information team to plan support for the campaign, which opens Sept. 20 and continues through Nov. 30.

The information team works closely with a full-time CFC staff of three persons.

Al Senter of the OI Publishing Division is handling the printing of tickets and material for an editor's kit. Jim Vechery of OI's Design Division is preparing camera-ready copy for pledge cards, awards certificates and posters. Jay Beavers of OI's Photography Division will be shooting all the big events.

Then there's the government-wide workshop for federal employee newsletter editors Aug. 8, to be hosted by OI director John McClung.

Katt, along with Deborah Smith of the Publishing Division and Sharon Edwards of the Special Programs Division (and editor of USDA's employee newsletter, "USDA") are preparing handouts for the workshop.

Highlight of the editors' meeting will be a field trip to a representative recipient agency of the CFC for interviews and picture-taking by the editors. A contest with various categories for these communicators is also in the works.

For those who would like more information about the CFC campaign or the newsletter editors' workshop, contact Sally Katt at (202) 382-9435.

BOOK LEARNING

When George Holcomb, with the Publishing Division of USDA's Office of Information, learned last year that USDA had a Seneca Indian, Stuart Jamieson, coordinating Native American affairs in the Office of Intergovernmental Affairs, he introduced himself and found Jamieson redoing a booklet on USDA services to Indians.

Jamieson said the tribes were using USDA programs and services "some," but that most of the 200-plus tribes did not really understand the breadth of USDA.

He suggested Holcomb do a booklet on the state of Indian agriculture and USDA.

So, Holcomb wrote to about 100 Indian publication editors for help and Jamieson wrote to the 200 tribal chiefs noting the project.

There was one written response, from an editor. Then things picked up.

Thanks to a note from another USDA information officer, Hubert Kelley (then information director for USDA's Soil Conservation Service and now Agricultural Research Service's information director), a score of SCS conservationists and others flooded Holcomb with photos and texts.

Then with similar cooperation/and help from other departments, such as Interior and HUD, Holcomb obtained so much material he had to condense it--into 250 typewritten pages.

A retired former acting Bureau of Indian Affairs commissioner and an Indian will be the primary reviewer. Holcomb hopes to publish this fall.

NEW SOUTHERN AG INFO OFFICERS ELECTED

Members of the Southern Association of Information Officers of State Departments of Agriculture have named Larry Michaud their president for 1984-85.

Michaud, information officer for the Louisiana Department of Agriculture, was named at the end of the organization's annual workshop held July 22-25 at Nashville, Tenn.

The workshop was hosted by Mark McBride, administrative assistant for public affairs for the Tennessee Department of Agriculture and the 1983-84 president of SAIOSDA.

June Brotherton, public affairs director for the North Carolina Department of Agriculture, was named vice president for the coming year, to succeed Michaud.

Ray Schreiner, information director for the Virginia Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services, was re-elected secretary-treasurer.

Howard Knotts, information director for the West Virginia Department of Agriculture, was named to the board as a member-at-large.

The state ag communicators attending the Nashville workshop discussed use of state farm radio networks with the farm director for the Tennessee Radio Network. They also shared ideas, concerns and successful approaches to information dissemination and exchange by state departments of agriculture.

The workshop attendees heard a number of speakers on various agricultural and communications topics. They also took part in a day-long agricultural and industrial tour of middle Tennessee.

The 1985 SAIOSDA workshop will be held in late July in Baton Rouge, La.

MAKING FOOD DOLLARS COUNT, PHASE II

The "Making Food Dollars Count" information project of USDA's Food & Nutrition Service is scheduled to enter phase II later this summer.

Last year, seven regional workshops were conducted for community leaders working with low income families, with heavy support from FNS' regional information staffs and the Special Programs Division of USDA's Office of Information.

The workshops focused on concepts of the revised 1983 thrifty food plan, which is the basis for determining food stamp program benefits.

Leaders shared their own ideas and materials for helping low income households to manage their food money and to select nutritious diets.

This year, a "Buy Better. Eat Better" theme will be presented in materials to be used primarily in food stamp certification centers.

A slide set is in the final stages of production by OI's Photography Division. OI's Design Division and Publishing Division also helped produce posters and fact sheets for the project.

Several public service announcements for radio are in production. Sample packets of materials will be sent to local certification officers who will be invited to order materials needed.

The slide sets will be shown in waiting rooms, generally, though some may be used in meetings with community organizations. Some materials will be available for sale later.

INSIDE INFORMATION is published for distribution to public affairs and information staff members of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, its agencies, State Departments of Agriculture and Land Grant Universities. Any items, comments and inquiries should be addressed to either John Crowley or Nancy Bevis, Office of Information, Room 536A, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, DC 20250, or to AGRO02 mailbox on the Dialcom system, or call (202) 447-7454.